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ABSTRACT

By providing opportunities for closer youth-adult contact, exercising responsibility, performing community service, and learning practical skills, well-functioning youth groups create important educational occasions which are often lacking in school. To point out the overlooked features of traditional youth groups, researchers interviewed and surveyed the directors, leaders, members, and members' parents of two 4-H clubs, two Girl Scout troops, and two Boy Scout troops. All six groups served as channels to the adult world by increasing members' contact with responsible, civic-minded, generous, and concerned adults. Four-H provided the most extensive youth-adult network. The groups' main activity was the successful teaching of practical skills not taught anywhere else. Each group's history and leadership affected which skills they emphasized. While all groups taught members some leadership skills, the Boy Scouts provided an especially structured program of leadership and responsibility development to prepare boys for business and community leadership roles. The groups also socialized the members for adult service organizations and stressed voluntary community responsibility. Parents and children generally agreed on the groups' major goals and benefits. Parents found that the groups gave them occasions to educate their children and give their children a working ideology. (SB)

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LESSONS OUT-OF-SCHOOL:

BOY SCOUTS, GIRL SCOUTS AND 4-H CLUBS AS EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENTS

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This paper departs from most research on education outside schools by examining what young people learn not from the workplace or from community-based school programs, but rather from an educational setting so commonplace we overlook it. This is the community youth group, such organizations as Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, and 4-H community clubs.

Approximately 17 million boys and girls belong to youth organizations of this type, more than a third of the eligible age group (La Belle, 1981).* Membership slumped during the 1970s but old line youth groups are now either holding steady or (as with scouting) making a slight comeback.

This study argues that traditional youth groups provide many of the experiences educators find lacking in schools and are seeking in innovative work and community-based school programs (Carnegie Council, 1979; President's Science Advisory Committee, 1974; National Panel on High Schools, 1976). These include:

-- *Closer contact between youth and adults from the community*
-- *Opportunities to take active, responsible roles*
-- *Experience in doing something of benefit to the community, and*
-- *Opportunity to learn practical, non-academic skills.*

For educators interested in developing and testing new approaches to out-of-school education, community youth groups offer possibilities. These groups are looking for volunteer help, searching for up-to-date ideas, and eager to expand their membership to low income and minority youth.

This paper offers an overview of the education that occurs in scouting and 4-H groups. Our intent is not to describe all these groups

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*These figures come from inquiries to the organizations and may be inflated.

in detail but rather to point out overlooked features of an oddly ignored educational system.

RESEARCH LITERATURE ON SCOUTING AND 4-H

Educators studying a tribal culture would be intrigued by a set of educational institutions outside the formal educational system, aimed at adolescents just passing into puberty, celebrating the core values of the society with oaths and rituals, and featuring exotic uniforms, badges, and insignia. Little research, however, has been done on American youth groups.

Those few scholars who have bothered to look at Boy Scouts dismiss it as a class-bound institution attempting to keep youth pure by isolating them from adults and keeping them occupied with trivial activities (Kett, 1977; Gillis, 1981; Hollingshead, 1975). Or they explore covert sexual themes in scouting activities (Mechling, 1978, 1980, 1981; Hantover, 1978).

We have located no research at all on Girl Scouts except one 1950s study on the characteristics of adolescent girls which was commissioned by Girl Scouts of America (Douvan and Kaye, 1957).

Since 4-H is sponsored by the Cooperative Extension Service in association with land grant universities, 4-H has been the subject of master's theses, doctoral dissertations, and government evalutions. A national evaluation of Cooperative Extension programs recently compiled and summarized this literature (Evaluation of Economic and Social Consequences of Cooperative Extension Programs, 1980; Kappa Systems, 1979; Science Management Corporation, 1979). Most studies of 4-H attempt to document specific effects of particular programs--a lamb raising project, a nutrition program, a recreational program for inner city youth.

What is missing from the research literature is a description of what experiences youth actually have in these kinds of organizations. As La Belle (1981:23) concludes in his review of the literature on youth groups:

> We know very little, for example, about the kinds of things that we take for granted when we talk about school, like who are the actors, what is the scope of their relationship and on what does the nonformal education process focus. We also know little about how nonformal education contributes to child development, its relationship to family socialization, or its effects on values, literacy and numeracy, or on a youngster's problem solving skills. Furthermore, we know little about what adults and youngsters who live in different size communities or regions seek from nonformal participation and whether it has agreed upon impact.

METHODS

Since we were interested in the education available in youth groups when they were functioning well, we asked the local executive directors of Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, and 4-H to suggest two examples of successful groups. We interviewed the leader and assistant leader in each of these six youth groups, at least 10 youth members, and a parent of each. We conducted a total of 133 youth organization interviews--63 with young people, 54 with parents, and 10 with leaders, assistant leaders, and executive directors.

In the interviews we asked open-ended questions about what respondents saw as the goals of the youth group, what young people learned from their participation, and what was different about learning in a youth group compared to learning at school.

These open-ended questions avoided leading the respondent. But people talked about what was important to them, and they forgot to

mention other features of youth groups. For this reason, we also requested all our respondents to complete a survey after the interview which systematically asked what the respondent saw as youth group goals, benefits, and areas where the youth group was more or less effective than school.

In addition to these interviews, we also attended youth group meetings and special events, such as Girl Scout Day, Scout-O-Rama, and 4-H Speech and Demonstration Day.

The young people we interviewed were active members who could give us a good idea of the kinds of experiences well-functioning youth groups offered. The social characteristics of our respondents resembled those of scouting and 4-H members nationally (Douvan and Kaye, 1957; Evaluation of Economic and Social Consequences, 1980; Survey Research Center, 1960). They were predominantly white (92 percent), early adolescents (75 percent were 11-14 years old), and of higher than average socio-economic status (40 percent of their fathers were professionals and 33 percent skilled laborers). Most (80 percent) had been youth group members for over a year and almost all (93 percent) said they attended virtually all meetings.

LEARNING EXPERIENCES IN YOUTH GROUPS

Scouting and 4-H evoke images of weekly meetings in the church basement, camping trips, cookie sales, and displays at state fairs. We see in them so much Norman Rockwell Americana that we fail to see these groups are creating new kinds of "educational occasions." These are occasions where young people can expand their relationships with adults other than teachers and parents. These are occasions where

young people can assume active, responsible roles they rarely have in school. These are occasions where young people can learn practical skills and use school skills. Youth groups also create new occasions for parents to teach their children; they intensify parents' educational role with early adolescent children.

Increased Contact With Adults

Four-H community clubs created the most extensive network of relationships between young people and adults. Four-H members belonged to a large community club which met once a month. In addition, young people in 4-H joined one or more small project clubs which met several times a month at the home of the project leader. The project leaders were typically neighbors or parents of other 4-H members who taught such skills as gardening, forestry, cooking, or carpentry. One 4-H community club we observed organized the neighborhood into a "school without walls" where people taught their hobby or an occupational skill to each other's children.

In Girl Scout troops, girls developed relationships primarily with their own scout leaders. Both leaders and parents told us that the leaders acted as counselors. Girls talked to them about sex or drugs, topics that parents did not necessarily want to discuss with their daughters and were glad the scout leaders did. Community people also taught skills at troop meetings. An Athabascan elder in her fifties taught girls to bead at one meeting we observed; at another a retired sportsman taught girls how to use a knife.

In Boy Scouts, scoutmasters developed companionable relationships with many of the boys, particularly active scouts. One scoutmaster,

for example, dropped over to the home of the senior patrol leader (the boy leader of the troop) to plan troop meetings. Another spent Saturdays with several new scouts building a sled in his workshop. He also drove groups of boys around town in his pick-up truck to collect newspapers for recycling or put up flags on national holidays.

The Boy Scout program explicitly attempts to teach young boys how to work with adults they do not know. Both of the scoutmasters we interviewed considered such training essential to preparing boys for business and community leadership. To earn merit badges, for example, boys were expected to call up adults who had volunteered to be merit badge counselors and arrange teaching sessions. Although some boys could not face the prospect of telephoning a stranger, others extended their social network to include other community adults. A young lawyer, for example, taught a citizenship badge; a trucker took boys out to work with him for a transportation badge; a church youth counselor prepared boys for a religious scouting award.

The scout program created many other occasions for contact between youth and adults. Boys advancing to higher ranks were required to face a Board of Review (like an oral examination), composed of troop parents and sometimes a representative from the scout office. In one troop, boys sold flag contracts to local businessmen. This project required them to call at a business, ask for the owner or manager, explain the offer to place flags at their business on major holidays, and complete a formal contract.

The point is not only that youth groups increase young people's contact with adults. The point is also that youth groups increase young

people's contact with a certain kind of adult--civic-minded, concerned with young people, generous with their time and energy. Research on the characteristics of youth group leaders suggest that they tend to be married, family oriented, religious, middle aged adults who are active in civic affairs (Survey Research Center, 1958, 1960; Pozza, 1966; Reagan, 1959; Brown and Boyle, 1964). Unlike employers or teachers, the adults who help out with youth groups are volunteers. Those we interviewed said they enjoyed being with children or felt that helping out was a social obligation.

Our data on the contacts between youth and adults in these settings suggest a different interpretation of how youth groups function than the standard view in the academic literature. Hollingshead (1975) and Kett (1977), for example, argue that youth groups segregate adolescents from the adult world and substitute make-believe and trivia for serious activities. What we observed was different. The youth group, far from being a barrier to the adult world, was a channel to it. At one troop meeting, for example, a scoutmaster tried to start a conversation with a boy about something he had seen in the newspaper. When the boy said he hadn't read it, the scoutmaster proclaimed in a voice loud enough for all to hear, "You don't read the newspaper? How can I have a discussion with you guys if you don't read the newspaper?" Adults in the youth group setting communicated quite clearly adult expectations for achievement, community service, taking responsibility for younger children, and meeting obligations to the group.

Young people in scouting and 4-H groups, in sum, became enmeshed

in a dense system of educational relationships outside school. The group itself provided a regular occasion for youth to work with adults. The groups we studied had adult-youth ratios ranging from a low of 1:4 in one Girl Scout troop to a high of 1:8 in a Boy Scout troop. These ratios reflected not only the number of leaders but also the presence of other adults--parents and people from the community--who joined the group to teach skills or observed meetings from the sidelines and occasionally helped out.

For 90 percent of the youth we interviewed, the youth group extended educational contacts beyond the group leader. In describing who helped them with badgework and projects, for example, 57 percent of the youth we interviewed mentioned their parents; 45 percent mentioned other adults in the community; 20 percent mentioned older adolescents in the organization; and 15 percent mentioned older brothers and sisters and other relatives.

Instruction in Practical Skills

The main activity in youth group meetings was teaching practical skills--how to make an emergency phone call, put in a garden, handle a case of food poisoning or a car stalled in a blizzard. Many of these skills young people did not learn at school. Either the skills were not taught at all or were taught at a higher grade level or were taught only in special programs such as automotive repair.

Most of the young people we interviewed said that they did not learn these skills at home. Some said their parents did not know them. "I don't learn sewing at home," one 4-H member told us. "My mother doesn't sew so she wanted me to learn at [neighbor's] and teach her."

Parents told us that they were too busy to do much teaching or that they needed the scout badge or 4-H project structure to get them going and suggest specific things to do. A father teaching a carpentry project to his son and other 4-H members remarked:

> My boy would have learned some anyway, but this focuses it. It sets a goal and specifies a unit. Records get turned in and everyone looks at it.

Each youth organization emphasized specific kinds of skills. Boy Scout troops taught mainly outdoor and emergency skills (Table 1). The boys learned how to put up a tent, keep boots from freezing at night, help a heart attack victim, put on a tourniquet, etc.

Despite the efforts of the national Girl Scout program to emphasize careers and other contemporary themes in female socialization, the girls in the two troops we studied learned mostly domestic and craft skills (Table 1). There were outdoor activities, but the girls typically did beading, art projects, make-up, and cooking.

Four-H taught the greatest variety of useful skills--carpentry, breadbaking, electrical circuitry, home repair, cooking, and skiing. Four-H emphasized skill development more than scouting and the skills had less ideological overlay. In 4-H, you studied cooking to learn to cook well; in Boy Scouts you studied cooking to learn to cook and to learn to be self-reliant; in Girl Scouts you studied cooking to learn to cook and to learn something about yourself--whether you do or don't like cooking.

What each program taught depended largely on its history. Four-H originated as a method of introducing useful practical skills into overly academic rural education, and expanded into skills useful in

TABLE 1

Educational Experiences Youth Report in Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, and 4-H Groups

	Boy Scouts	Girl Scouts	4-H	Total
Practical Knowledge and Skills				
Outdoor skills	100%	90%	15%	70%
Arts and Craftwork	23	95	85	67
Domestic skills	14	62	85	52
Mechanical, electrical, and other related skills	59	19	60	46
Athletic skills	77	38	5	41
Emergency skills	86	29	-	40
Personal appearance	-	38	5	14
Verbal Abstract Knowledge	77	62	25	56
Role Learning				
How to lead a group	64	5	35	35
How to speak in public	42	-	55	32
How to plan and organize an activity	23	33	35	30
How to work in a group	27	19	15	21
How to teach younger peers	41	5	0	16
Service Activities				
Community service	32	57	65	52
Citizenship	91	5	5	35
N =	22	21	20	63

SOURCE: ISER Survey of Youth Organizations, 1980.

urban settings (Reck, 1951). Boy Scouts was designed to provide the outdoor experiences felt necessary to teach manliness to the growing population of city boys (Hantover, 1978). Girl Scouts was modeled after the Boy Scout program, but first emphasized traditional and later contemporary notions about proper preparation for female roles and obligations.

What each youth group taught depended on the national program and its history but also on local concerns and on the particular interests of adult leaders. Scouting troops in Alaska, for example, taught how to survive at 40 degrees below zero; those in New Mexico taught how to survive without water in the desert. Adults taught what they knew about and what they found important in their own lives.

Four-H and scouting emphasized "learning by doing"--teaching skills in a setting where they could be used. Boy Scouts, for example, learned how to start a fire with wet wood by waking up on a sub-freezing camp-out, finding all the wood was wet, and learning to strip off the bark.

Given the official ideology, however, we were surprised by how much time young people in youth groups actually spent practicing school skills. Many projects and badges emphasized verbal abstract skills (Table 1). Boy Scout badges, for example, required young people to write a letter to a public official about a national issue, report on a world problem, or explain the meaning of words like "biosphere." Four-H projects were rarely so school-like, but young people had to keep detailed written records on the project they did with particular attention to costs.

The research literature on scouting and 4-H suggests these

organizations are successful in teaching skills. A national evaluation of the 4-H program concluded that gains in knowledge and skills was "extensively documented" (Evaluation of Economic and Social Consequences, 1980:116). A national survey of 11-13 year old boys found that significantly more Boy Scouts than boys who had not been scouts said that they knew how to do such things as report a fire, figure out what to do when lost in the woods, care for a bad cut, give artificial respiration, or use a compass (Survey Research Center, 1960). Youth groups teach a variety of skills that young people often do not have a chance to learn elsewhere.

Experience in Leadership and Other Active Roles

Youth groups gave young people experience in running a meeting and in taking responsibility for the welfare of an organization. All the youth groups emphasized developing "leadership"--by which they meant teaching members how to conduct a formal meeting and how to work with a group of people to get a job done. A 4-H leader described the process:

> First there is a business meeting so officers can get the experience of leading an organization and using parliamentary procedure. They learn to set up committees, supervise the committees, plan for a year.

A Girl Scout leader reported with pride that the girls themselves had organized a mother-daughter tea. "The girls would meet at home in a bedroom for hours planning it--planning the invitations, decorations, getting permission from the military to use the building."

In all the youth groups we observed, the adolescents did conduc

the formal meeting. Adult leaders coached from the sidelines. The adolescents also did some planning of the program, although much less than the program recommended or the leaders intended.

Boy Scouts, much more than the other organizations, had a carefully structured program to develop leadership skills. Almost two-thirds of the Boy Scouts we interviewed described leadership experiences compared to only 5 percent of Girl Scouts and 35 percent of 4-H members. Boy Scouts also reported considerable experience in other active roles, such as teaching younger boys badge skills and speaking in public (Table 1).

The scoutmasters we interviewed saw Boy Scouts explicitly as preparing boys for public leadership in business, government, and community affairs. In the eyes of the scoutmasters, the troop structure--senior patrol leader supervising patrol leaders in turn responsible for their patrols--represented the paradigm management case. And Boy Scouts provided management training. "It's like being in business," one scoutmaster explained. "We are preparing them to make the kinds of decisions an adult has to make and to learn how to manage people."

In the troops we observed, the boys occupying leadership roles took their responsibility seriously. As one boy described his role as assistant senior patrol:

> The troop has two boy leaders who run the troop. The boys are supposed to do most of the work and that's what we try to do. You learn basic leadership skills. I'm the assistant leader in charge of all the patrol leaders. We make sure everything gets done and keep things going. For example, camping. We decide on dates for camping, vote on what patrol brings what, call up scouts, and split costs. We make sure the patrol leaders take care of everything.

Boy Scout leadership roles placed heavy demands on boys' skills, time, and emotional energy. The senior patrol leader had to keep order and keep boys busy in a two hour or more evening meeting with boys spread from eleven to over sixteen years of age, all tired and cooped up from school. The senior patrol leader had to organize teaching groups for boys at widely different levels of skill. He had to handle challenges to his authority and figure out how to lead without bossing and losing his friends. Boys learned how to do these things mainly by observing slightly older boys who held these roles, criticizing their performance, and then attempting the role themselves. Boys were highly aware of what was appropriate leadership behavior and monitored the conduct of present incumbents. ("You're supposed to be teaching us." "You're supposed to be here for meetings.")

Parents and youth saw developing leadership skills and teaching young people how to plan activities as major goals of youth organizations and major benefits (Table 2). In these areas, they saw youth groups as more effective than schools where early adolescents held passive, dependent roles.

Occasions to Assume Community Responsibilities

Scouting and 4-H groups created opportunities for early adolescents to do things of service to the community. Unlike schools and jobs, youth groups stressed voluntary responsibility, accepting community obligations. When we asked them what they did in youth groups, over half the youth talked about community activities such as picking up litter during the annual spring clean-up day, buying toys for children at the hospital, singing carols at the old age home, and planting grass at the fairgrounds (Table).

TABLE 2

Parent and Youth Views of Educational Goals and Benefits of Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, and 4-H Groups*

	Proportion Viewing Goal as "Very Important"		Proportion Perceiving "A Lot of Benefit"		Proportion Perceiving Youth Organization as More Effective than School	
	Parent	Youth	Parent	Youth	Parent	Youth
Developing leadership	69%	67%	72%	62%	63%	69%
Teaching importance of helping community	79%	79%	72%	67%	69%	67%
Teaching how to plan activities	79%	63%	77%	62%	45%	64%
Providing free time activities	50%	32%	41%	22%	63%	56%
Increasing parent/ youth togetherness	29%	35%	39%	40%	41%	45%
Having fun	52%	40%	54%	50%	45%	38%
Developing character and citizenship	79%	68%	68%	59%	34%	37%
Teaching new skills	81%	79%	77%	73%	19%	33%
Helping youth find friends	48%	46%	50%	49%	30%	29%
Preventing drinking and drug use	50%	52%	27%	31%	32%	19%
N =	48	63	48	61	46	62

*Since very few differences appeared between different youth groups, they are combined in the analysis.

SOURCE: ISER Survey of Youth Organizations, 1980.

In Girl Scouts and 4-H, young people worked in a group on service activities (usually ones the leader suggested). Boy Scout troops also worked as a group, for example, raising money for the troop by recycling aluminum cans or raising money to buy hospital equipment for the handicapped by running a car wash all day Saturday.

To advance to the higher scout ranks, however, boys had to identify, organize, and carry out a service activity of their own. To attain the top rank of Eagle Scout, a boy not only had to plan the service activity; he also had to demonstrate "community leadership ability" by persuading others to help out with the work as volunteers.

One boy, for example, decided to repair all the windows in the church where his troop met for his Eagle project. He not only had to figure out how to fix the windows and how to get the money to pay for the new glass but also how to get other boys to spend their Saturdays helping him. Scout leaders, parents, and boys saw the Eagle service project as a showpiece effort, tangible evidence of what scouting was all about.

Members of youth groups also had responsibilities for helping others within the group. Four-H members taught project skills to younger ones. Experienced scouts were expected to take care of new boys on camp-outs. "The senior patrol leader," one 16 year old put it, "looks out for the little wimps to make sure they don't fall off a cliff or get hypothermia."

Scouting and 4-H groups resembled adult service organizations and socialized young people for these kinds of community groups. Parents and youth viewed "teaching the importance of helping the community" as a major benefit of youth groups and an area where the

youth group was far more effective than school (Table 2).

Occasions for Parents to Educate

Parents used scouting and 4-H groups as educational tools. Of the 40 parents we interviewed, 85 percent had strongly encouraged their children to join the youth group. Parents wanted the group to do specific things for their children--to expose their son "the houseboy" to physical activity, to put a boy without a father in close contact with adult males, to help their difficult daughter learn how to get along with other girls.

Parents also encouraged their children to join youth groups because they wanted to place their children in a situation outside the family where traditional values were reinforced. Parents and young people saw teaching the importance of helping the community and developing character and citizenship as central goals of youth groups (Table 2). Families felt that the public schools and other social institutions no longer supported such values. The youth group placed children with a group of adults and other children who shared the family's view of what counts. As one Boy Scout mother put it:

> In the world we live in there is a tendency of the kids to want to be entertained, to want to do fun things, not things that involve service. We want to teach kids that's not what life is all about.

The youth group not only reinforced family values; it also reinforced the role of parents as educators of their early adolescent children. Badgework and projects drew parents into teaching roles. One mother, for example, told us she had worked for six hours with her son one weekend going over the first aid badge. Another described

how she helped her daughter put together the 4-H newsletter each month. Another talked about how she taught her son (troop scribe) to keep clear records.

When their children had to memorize the youth group oath or pledge, some parents used the occasion to discuss with their children the meaning of such concepts as loyalty or courage. Parents also made use of youth group codes of conduct in talking to children about their behavior:

> At 12 or 13 they get very critical of other kids and teachers. We've been trying to use the scouting program. It's not consistent with scout laws, courtesy and kindness to be so critical.

We asked parents whether the youth organization had any effec on their family life; over half said it had brought the family together. On our questionnaires, however, parents and youth did not rate "increasing parent/youth togetherness" as either a major goal or a major benefit of youth groups.

The reason for this discrepancy, we suspect, is that the youth groups attracted families where parents already spent a lot of time with their children. The youth group intensified this relationship by providing convenient new avenues. One father, for example, explained that he had taken time off work to go on a scout canoe trip with his son:

> The canoe trip gave me an avenue for a special relationship with Dave. He's the second child . . . . But if it hadn't been scouting I'd have found something else to do.

DEVELOPMENTAL EFFECTS

We have attempted to identify important and generally ignored learning experiences that occur in youth groups. We have not attempted to examine the educational effects of participation apart from the views of our respondents. The youth and parents we interviewed saw these organizations as successful in developing leadership and planning abilities, teaching youth the importance of helping the community, developing character and citizenship, and teaching new skills (Table 2). Similar results have been obtained in other questionnaire and interview research, particularly the numerous studies of 4-H groups (cf., Steele and Everson, 1978; Issacs, 1978; Aylsworth, 1966).

Such testimonials obviously do not demonstrate that educational effects have occurred. They demonstrate only that young people and their parents believe educational effects have occurred. When we began this study, we disregarded statements of this type. When a twelve year old girl, for example, said she had learned "responsibility" through 4-H, we assumed she was doing no more than quoting organizational rhetoric, giving us back the official code. As we continued our interviewing however, we began to consider a different view. The organizational ideology appeared to be providing a set of concepts participants were using to <u>interpret</u> the <u>meaning</u> of the youth group experience. One adolescent, for example, described getting up at 7:00 a.m. on a Saturday morning to pick up trash in terms of "loyalty" and "responsibility."

> You have to be loyal to 4-H; like on Clean-Up Day you should go out and not sleep in because you want the city to be beautiful. You have to be responsible.

The ideology appeared to function cognitively as an "advance organizer"; it helped define the nature of the experience.

The organizational ideology, we suspect, makes such concepts as responsibility or leadership salient to young people. The concepts become part of their cognitive equipment, part of the way they assess the world. One mother, for example, told us her eleven year old son began to talk about certain parents as "not being responsible" after he had become an active Boy Scout. Previously, he had not used the term "responsibility" to talk about other peoples' behavior.

We have not tested these notions systematically. One possibility might be successive interviews with youth group members and non-members which examine the development of such concepts as "leadership" or "community service" in terms of complexity, specificity, and detail. Do youth group members know more, for example, about how one goes about running a group than non-members and are they more interested in taking on such roles?

While such research would be of more value than testimonials, the central issue, after all, is not knowledge or attitudes but actual behavior. As older adolescents or adults, are youth group members indeed more active in community leadership and service roles?

Selection effects, however, inevitably destroy such comparisons. The kind of young person who joins scouting and 4-H groups differs from those who do not. Boy Scouts, for example, tend to come from higher socioeconomic, more church oriented families who provide a variety of developmental experiences for their children (Survey Research Center, 1960). Several studies of 4-H members suggest that they tend to be

more achievement and task oriented than the general population and to come from families more active in church and other community organizations (Kreitlow, Pierce, and Middleton, 1961; Brown and Boyle, 1964; A Study of 4-H Youth and 4-H Programming, 1974).

The difficulties of separating such selection effects from the effects of participation in the youth group is well-illustrated by a massive study of the impact of Boy Scouts on character development. According to Levy (1944), the classic research of Hartshore, Hugh, and May, Studies in Deceit, found that Boy Scouts behaved no more honestly than other boys. In response to this critique, the Boy Scouts launched an elaborate two-year study to examine the effectiveness of scouting as a character moulding force. The research consisted of 917 case studies of representative scouts and non-scouts in 11 randomly chosen U.S. communities. A trained fieldworker interviewed each boy and obtained testimony from teachers, clergymen, and other adults. The study demonstrated clearly that Boy Scouts as a group were superior in character to non-scouts. However, the study concluded that it was just as possible that good character causes scout membership as the reverse.

In some situations, such as examining community-based school programs where the selection strategy is known, research on outcomes may be valuable. In other situations, such as youth groups, where selection effects are massive but subtle, a descriptive approach may be more appropriate to answering questions about effects. What skills does the organization teach and to what level of proficiency? To what extent does the organization develop educational relationships between young people and adults in the community? What specific values and ideas do these adults communicate? What opportunities do young people have to observe and practice leadership

and community service roles? Good description, in short, may be more valuable than poor comparisons.

CONCLUSION

Every youth group does not provide effective learning experiences any more than every classroom does. What goes on educationally depends a great deal on the abilities of the particular leader, whether the leader sees the group's goal as mainly education or mainly recreation, and whether parents are active in the group. But well-functioning youth groups, despite their bland image, create important educational occasions which rarely happen in schools.

Educators interested in increasing young people's relationships with adults who can serve as mentors and teachers will find in youth groups a promising structure. Educators interested in increasing young people's opportunities to hold responsible roles and contribute to the community will find in youth groups possibilities as well. These groups are far more open to educational innovations than schools. And they attract more minority and lower income youth than their popular image suggests.

Rather than being viewed as trivial institutions, youth groups should be seen as one form of community-based education--parents' attempts to provide their children with a set of educational experiences they believe is missing from public schooling. Particular clubs and troops flourish and decline. Volunteers grow tired and early adolescents grow up and move on to more adult activities. But youth groups themselves are a sign of health in a society, of people concerned enough about education to teach without recompense other people's children.

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